

## **A Neighborhood Investment**

*Tax credits help boost Asbury's west side.*

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**Keith Brown**

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It needs affordable housing, safer streets. It needs city pools, youth recreation programs. Neighborhoods — specifically those on the city's west side — need new investment, a group of civic and private industry representatives said Monday.

A jolt of that new investment — worth \$200,000 from Jersey Central Power & Light — was announced Monday by officials from state and local government at the headquarters of InterFaith Neighbors Inc. The money will help fund the first year of a 10-year revitalization plan for the neighborhoods west of Memorial Drive, outlined by Interfaith and accepted by the state Department of Community Affairs.

"For once, we're not waiting to turn the corner — we've turned the corner," said Hazel Samuels, city director of community development. "You can build all the fancy condos on the beachfront you want, but for us to be a truly healthy, revitalized city, we've got to involve our neighborhoods."

JCP&L announced its participation in the state's Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit Program, which allows corporations that contribute to targeted neighborhoods to receive a 100 percent tax credit on every investment dollar.

"It's a slam-dunk from an economic standpoint," said Stephen E. Morgan, JCP&L president. "We understand the value of a strong and vibrant community."

InterFaith, a nonprofit faith-based charity group based in Asbury Park, has developed a decadelong revitalization plan for the city's neighborhoods west of Memorial Drive. The plan has been approved by the Community Affairs Department and includes construction of affordable-housing units, construction of youth recreation facilities, renovation of other recreational and educational buildings

"If this city is going to make it, the whole city has to benefit," said Paul L. McEvily, associate executive director of the 19-year-old InterFaith organization. "Something has to happen for the west side."

The investment by JCP&L puts the nonprofit group in a position to begin the first year of its revitalization plan. The organization plans to establish a home for the Police Athletic League's youth boxing program, build seven affordable-housing units on five tracts, purchase lighting for the city's Little League fields and refurbish the indoor pool at the city's Boys and Girls Club.

Monday was a "banner day" for InterFaith and for the revitalization of the west side, said Joseph Marmora, Interfaith's executive director, added that he was humbled by the utility company's contribution.

"You will be proud of the work that we do," he said.

Charles A. Richman, acting community affairs commissioner, said he was "delighted" to make available the program to join public and private sector partnerships that will "help to bring neighborhoods back."

JCP&L joins with other contributors to Interfaith's west side revitalization program. Earlier this year, New Jersey Resources — parent company of New Jersey Natural Gas — made a \$500,000 contribution, according Micah Rasmussen, a company spokesman.

A relationship between NJNG and Interfaith goes back several years, so when the nonprofit approached the company with its revitalization plans, it seemed a logical choice to participate, Rasmussen said.

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